

**A MANUAL FOR
COMMUNION CLASSES
AND COMMUNICANT
MEETINGS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649044887

A Manual for Communion Classes and Communicant Meetings by C. Pickering Clarke

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A MANUAL FOR COMMUNION CLASSES.



A MANUAL
FOR COMMUNION CLASSES
AND COMMUNICANT
MEETINGS.

ADDRESSED SPECIALLY TO THE PARISH PRIESTS
AND DEACONS OF THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND.

BY C. PICKERING CLARKE, M.A.
AUTHOR OF "THE ACTS AND WRITINGS
OF THE APOSTLES."



LONDON:
BELL AND DALDY, 186, FLEET STREET.
1863.

100. u. 121.

TO THE
REV. PHILIP CAMERON WODEHOUSE,

This Manual

IS INSCRIBED BY THE COMPILER, IN REMEMBRANCE
OF THE WORK WHICH THEY WERE ALLOWED
TO CARRY ON TOGETHER, FROM
EASTER TO WHITSUNTIDE,

1862.

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[*Ad Clerum.*]

A MANUAL FOR COMMUNION
CLASSES.

I.

NOTHING is more difficult than the kindling in the hearts of one's people a feeling of the necessity of Frequent Communion. Some—perceiving at once how inconsistent are their lives with any thought of such blessing, avoid the subject altogether. They dare not alter these lives: the sins and errors, which entangle them, seem to make their sole enjoyment. Therefore they are compelled in very decency to keep away. Some—never having felt any real strength from eating and drinking that blessed Body and Blood, never experience any hunger or thirst after it. Some—and perhaps the greater number—altogether lack courage to come. Frequent Communion is the exception with those amongst whom they live; they do not like to separate themselves from friends and acquaintances, even if it were possible, and so to make their habits of living quite distinct. Some—the very few, it is to be feared (for their state of mind and habit of life is preferable)—conscientiously keep away; either they be-

lieve that something of its sanctity is lost in too often handling this Sacrament,—or else they feel that it requires greater and more earnest preparation than they can devote to it, amid their constant occupations and employments.

Still, let the Parish Priest carefully and quietly think over the matter. Let him enquire of *himself* for a substantial reason why so many, whom he has most anxiously prepared for Confirmation and First Communion, become truants as the years glide by. Let him question his own experience, why they fall into follies and sins which the strength of the Sacrament would enable them to resist; why wilfully they expose themselves to temptations which the constant contemplation of the Saviour would shut out from their eyes: and then, perhaps, he may find that some of the blame clings to himself. So much stress laid on this holy mystery by the Saviour; itself the very centre of the scheme of Christian theology: not a mere form, not a mere trust, but the principle of life, all his energies, all his powers, should be directed towards making his people Communicants. Doubtless it is a very difficult work, and the gravest responsibility rests on it. He will have to do battle with the individual sins of those entrusted to him. He will have to stand in the way and oppose many an impulsive and resolute will. He will have to help others to lift their burdens, and in part to bear them himself, gently, tenderly. It is a hard task! However, he is under the most solemn obligation manfully to face it. Therefore let him fitly and rightly prepare himself for his work.

First, he must put off all pride, all self-consciousness, all officious inquisitiveness (which latter is likely to be greatly excited in this work). He must humble him-

self, cleanse and purify his own heart by fullest Confession to God, and by Prayer. Then looking round his parish, with a view to fulfilling his duty in this respect, the work must not originate in some sudden thought, in order to pass the afternoon,—“ Oh, I'll go to this one or that, and talk to them about coming to the Sacrament next Sunday !” It must be a work, a visit gravely undertaken, after long meditation and communing with God. It must not be a hasty resolve which sends him to hunt up his people in such matters after a gossip with some district visitor ; because he may have heard strange reports, and wishes to inform himself about them. The attendance and non-attendance of his flock at Holy Communion, and their preparation for it, must be a subject of constant and watchful anxiety to him : but never of a worldly and speculative concern. His doubts and fears and alarms must be known only to himself and God, and must be confided only to Him Who is alone able to help him.

Secondly, he must ask for the Spirit's guidance in any course he may pursue to gain the lapses. For, let him be ever so much on his guard against suggesting sins, which may never have crossed the thought ; let him be ever so careful lest he substitute for facts his own foregone conclusions ; let him have the most wholesome dread of playing the tyrant over a weak conscience ; still will he scarce ever be able to rescue and convince by his own powers unaided. We may say, indeed, *never*.

Thirdly, let him diligently put his own house in order ! He must examine *himself*. Is the Sacrament to *him* a blessed thing ? Does he really feel need for it, as he ministers at God's altar ? or, is it to him matter of routine and duty ? All his efforts will be unavailing, unless they flow forth from a sincere and